

THE POCAHONTAS TIMES

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CALVIN W. PRICE, EDITOR.

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Brethren, let your thoughts go back—Those pioneers of frontier life, Who braved upon the outbound track,

The tomahawk and scalping knife. Lightly the earth rests on their bones Those men of a heroic age; They rest in peace, by their grave stones

We keep a precious heritage,

Life, liberty, and happiness—

The scroll is short but is complete;

Those lives of warring righteousness, Shine like a lamp unto the feet.

Once more our rights we now define,

Once more we fight for what we feel,

When kultur forms a battle-line,

The proper answer is cold steel.

In 1778, a man by the name of Lawrence Drinnon lived at the foot of Drinnon's Ridge at the mouth of Stony Creek, in the upper edge of what is now the town of Marlinton. His house stood where the old Gay homestead now stands. He had made a permanent home there. He had cleared the rich bottom land and was living in ease and comfort. He was the owner of at least one slave who made his home with him. His house was the most important one in this part of the county. At that time there were settlers living at Dunmore, Cass, Clover Lick, Huntersville, Swago and the Levels.

The population was about five hundred in that part of the Greenbrier Valley which is now in the bounds of Pocahontas County. That year, 1778, this part of the valley was in the counties of Augusta and Greenbrier. The year before the settlers living from the mouth of Swago down the river had succeeded in cutting off Jolietourt west of the Alleghany Mountain, and formed a new county. They were not able to dismember Augusta, and we people here remained a part of Augusta, though unbeknownst to us, a new county called Monongalia, under a loosely drawn act of the legislature was claiming to the Main Alleghany, a little matter that caused some law suits in after years. Monongalia was that indefinite country known as West Augusta.

Lawrence Drinnon had moved to the Greenbrier as a successor to An-

troit. So working under the cover of the bank they blocked the rail fence up off of the ground, and cutting a long pole, they made a loop with a deer skin throng, and noosed the head of the unfortunate school teacher and dragged his body over the bank of the river where they secured the scalp. They then silently stole away. Thus passes the name of Baker as a clan name in Pocahontas county, whereas Richard Hill founded a family, and his descendants form one of the most numerous and important connections of the county. There are hundreds of Hills, and not a native by the name of Baker in the county.

Lawrence Drinnon then took things in charge. The first thing that he did was to figure on getting word to the Little Levels where there was a fort on the on the little round hillock on which the Isaac McNeel mansion now stands at Mill Point. This was Fort Buckley, not Fort Beckley, as some histories have it. Sending word that the Indians had appeared in the country was about the most important duty that devolved upon a settler. The messenger was a man who occupied the position of great danger and much depended upon his skill and judgment. For the purpose of getting word to the lower end of the county, Drinnon chose a colored man who performed this duty and the Levels people got together that day a little army of twenty guns and came up to Drinnons.

The woods had opened and swallowed up the Indian invaders. There was no trace left. They found the body of Baker lying by the river. They stayed at Drinnon's that night, and the next day they carried the body a short way up Stony Creek where the town of Campbelltown now stands. The grave was in sight of the school house which stood just across the creek. This is the first school of which there is any record in the county, and it is probably the oldest as the settlement at Marlins Bottom was the oldest west of the Alleghany.

It is about time to do justice to the slave who brought the army from the Levels to the relief of the Drinnons. There never was many slaves in Pocahontas county, and there never was but one colored Indian fighter in this county. So it is now declared that the messenger who took the word to the Levels of this

the Bridger boys were killed. The colored man escaped unhurt.

This terrible killing on the way to the Levels had the effect of putting all those who knew of it into the fort and the danger then was over.

That Lawrence Drinnon must have been considerable of a man. We find him spoken of with affection in Bishop Asbury's book as living here in 1784. Bishop Asbury stayed with him on his way on horse back on his circuit that ran from Maine to Georgia. The Drinnon name has faded out of the county, but Lawrence Drinnon has many descendants. George W. McCollam is a great-grandson.

The Indians evidently knew that there was no longer any use for secrecy, so they gave the war whoop, and started to clean up. This bunch of Indians evidently came from the North as they went out that way. They went down into the Swago valley and surprised a settler by the name of Hugh McIver. That name is now spelled McKeever in this county. They killed Hugh McIver, and took his wife prisoner and no doubt killed her. Then they got John Prior, wife and child; then a Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Thomas Drinnon, one of Thomas Drinnon's young children, and an old couple by the name of Monday. These people were killed or captured as the raiders were leaving. In all that terrible day cost the lives of twelve persons in this immediate neighborhood, and with Henry Baker the day before, the total is thirteen.

Thomas Drinnon lived at Edray. He made that clearing there. Mrs. Drinnon was taken only a short distance over Elk Mountain and killed. Drinnon's child was named Charles. He was carried into captivity and raised by the Indians and after many years returned to the Edray neighborhood. He was always attached to the ways of the Indians and had a good word for them.

There is this confusion about the two last raids into the Greenbrier Valley. The Fort Donnelly fight in the Big Levels of Greenbrier was by a very large party, fully 200 Indians, who had trailed up the Big Kanawha way, and they had a pitched battle. They may have been sent out from Detroit or not, but there of no question but what the Drinnon fight was part of the campaign from Detroit

drawn act of the legislature was claiming to the Main Alleghany, a little matter that caused some law suits in after years. Monongalia was that indefinite country known as West Augusta.

Lawrence Drinnon had moved to the Greenbrier as a successor to Andrew Sitlington who had married the widow Warwick. Sitlington and his wife had a lot of farms in Rockbridge, Augusta, Bath and Pocahontas.

The Indians had been troublesome in years gone by but they had about given up raiding this part of the country as the white people were here in sufficient numbers to protect themselves. They had about ceased to think about the Indians, and were bothered more by fugitives from the thickly settled part of Virginia, who had a way of fleeing to the mountains whenever the officers of the law got after them in the lowlands. They had gone so far as to employ an elegant writer called Patrick Henry to draw up a high sounding petition to King George to form a colony between the crest of the Alleghany mountain and the Ohio River to be known as Vandalia. This was signed by Pocahontas people and some others, and it might have made the 14th colony but for the fact that King George lost his jurisdiction over this part of the country about this time.

One summer morning in the year 1778, though some say, 1779, and others 1780, a band of 22 Indian warriors lined themselves up just under the river bank, on the west of the ford between the two pools which form the Gay Eddy. A cleared field about a hundred yards broad lay between them and the Drinnon homestead. A rail fence was made on the edge of the bank and this helped to conceal their tufted heads, and afforded a rest for their rifles.

About day break the Drinnons commenced to stir around. A school teacher by the name of Henry Baker and another young man by the name of Richard Hall got up and accord-

ed the slave who brought the army from the Levels to the relief of the Drinnons. There never was many slaves in Pocahontas county, and there never was but one colored Indian fighter in this county. So it is now declared that the messenger who took the word to the Levels of this invasion, and who did his part so well that there need not have been another victim of this raid, was no other than a man whose first and last name was Ben, freed by an order of the county court of Pocahontas county, forty-nine years after, for his fidelity during an Indian invasion in defending the inhabitants of this county from the tomakawk and the scalping knife. This county at that time had suffered but this one invasion of Indians within the memory of life of men at the time that the order was entered. His devotion and services to his late master Major Warwick were proved by other witnesses and referred to in another paragraph of the order. In the same year, May, Dick Pointer, another colored man, acted with great bravery in defense of Fort Donnelly, and he was given his freedom for gallantry in action.

The school teacher having been buried, and there being no fort here at the time though there had been a fort called Greenbrier erected by Gen. Andrew Lewis at Marlins Bottom, in 1755, the armed force withdrew to the Levels taking with them the people of this community and most of the property.

The Indians had been watching the activities of the settlers and prepared an ambush through which the trail passed. This gap is the Bridger Gap near where the residence of the late James McNeill stands. It was the nearest route but the country was level to the left along which the pike now runs, and the woods were open. The pioneers figured it out, that the gap would be a likely place for an ambuscade and took the longer way around through the open woods.

It is a feature of Indian warfare that in all the campaigns both great

and very large parties, fully 200 Indians, who had trailed up the Big Kanawha way, and they had a pitched battle. They may have been sent out from Detroit or not, but there of no question but what the Drinnon fight was part of the campaign from Detroit when the plans were laid to kill all the settlers west of the Alleghany Mountain. These bands appeared in many settlements from Kentucky to Michigan, and as far west as Vincennes. The fight at this place marks the extreme eastern fight of that campaign.

We have been piecing this thing together for years and we have made some positive assertions here that have not appeared before. There seems to have been no extended account of the massacre such as was preserved of the Fort Donnelly fight by Col. Stuart. Yet not a white person was killed at Donnelly's, though 17 red men lay dead in the yard. Yet there is no detailed account of the fight that was so much more serious in this county, when thirteen whites were killed or captured and not a redskin injured.

There has been much conjecture as to whom this man John Prior was who got killed with his wife and child in this community at this time. No one here ever knew anything about him so far as we ever heard. But there is a significant fact.

After the battle of Point Pleasant four years before, the whites maintained a strong garrison at that place and this kept the warriors from the Ohio towns back from entering the Kanawha Valley. In 1778 a large army of Indians attacked that fort but withdrew after a time and went up the river. They could have but one destination and that was to war upon the Greenbrier settlements. Captain McKee sent a detachment to warn the Greenbrier people but in a day or two they returned and said that the Indian army had split up into small detachments to hunt the valley thoroughly and that they

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many railroad cars besides. This is no year applies particularly to the 18 to furnish its food, but a count den on the food producing act

Pocahontas County

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wounded Prior. Prior got away and reached the settlement in the Levels and related the incident and died of his wounds that night.

It can be said with all but positive certainty though no historian connects the incidents that John Prior volunteered at Point Pleasant and saved Fort Donnelly. That at the time he had a wife and child. And that after accomplishing that great work, he fell a victim to a small roving band of Indians who had slipped into the Greenbrier settlements from the north. This is another straw that causes us to fix the year as 1778, though a very pretty story could be built up in which John Prior married in the Greenbrier country and started back for the fort at Point Pleasant two years after.

Taking it all in all, it can be said that the Drinnon massacre was the worse day Pocahontas people ever

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→ others 1780, a band of 22 Indian warriors lined themselves up just under the river bank, on the west of the ford between the two pools which form the Gay Eddy. A cleared field about a hundred yards broad lay between them and the Drinnon homestead. A rail fence was made on the edge of the bank and this helped to conceal their tufted heads, and afforded a rest for their rifles.

About day break the Drinnons commenced to stir around. A school teacher by the name of Henry Baker and another young man by the name of Richard Hill, got up and according to the custom of the country, stepped down to the river to wash. They went directly towards the Indians, who let them come to a point within fifteen feet of the ends of the rifles. Baker being the school teacher was naturally walking in front, and when the Indians fired, Baker was instantly killed, but Hill was able to get back to the house before the Indians could load and fire.

The Drinnon house was instantly put into a state of defense, and the roar of the guns alarmed the neighborhood. The Indians remained under cover of the bank, and the Drinnons watched the place through the loop-holes of the house, with the body of the school teacher lying between them, but just out of reach of the Indians.

The Indians had no intention of allowing any of their party to get hurt, and after a time decided to retire. At the same time they had no intention of not securing the scalp as a voucher to be cashed in at De

of the property.

The Indians had been watching the activities of the settlers and prepared an ambush through which the trail passed. This gap is the Bridger Gap near where the residence of the late James McNeill stands. It was the nearest route but the country was level to the left along which the pike now runs, and the woods were open. The pioneers figured it out, that the gap would be a likely place for an ambuscade and took the longer way around through the open woods.

It is a feature of Indian warfare that in all the campaigns both great and small that the whites never were under military discipline. They were not subject to orders though they went through the form of electing officers. Any soldier could use his own pleasure in warfare, and this element now came to the fore when three men, John and James Bridger, and the colored man, whom tradition says was named Natnan, but who was Ben of the court order, elected to go by the gap. The tradition is that it was against the orders of the commander of the soldiers that the Bridgers went through the gap, but this does not agree with reason. And could only be accounted for by the lack discipline referred to above. It is pretty certain that it was a part of the plan to send them through on a scout, and they probably volunteered for this dangerous duty. It is not at all likely that the colored man would have been with them on any errand than that of a well defined plan for the safety of the community. The scouts walked into the trap and

four years before, the whites maintained a strong garrison at that place and this kept the warriors from the Ohio towns back from entering the Kanawha Valley. In 1778 a large army of Indians attacked that fort but withdrew after a time and went up the river. They could have but one destination and that was to war upon the Greenbrier settlements. Captain McKee sent a detachment to warn the Greenbrier people but in a day or two they returned and said that the Indian army had split up into small detachments to hunt the valley thoroughly and that they did not believe that they could get through to give the warning. Captain McKee immediately asked for two volunteers, "who would risk their lives to save the people of Greenbrier," and John Prior and Phillip Hammond stepped forward. These two scouts passed through the Indian lines on Meadow River twenty miles west of the Fort and thereby saved the settlement. They arrived about sunset. The next morning the attack was made before daylight. The Indians were beaten off without a loss on the part of the whites. The killed on the part of the Indians was almost unprecedented as the Indians invariably played safe in their warfare and the slightest personal danger if known to them would break up any expedition.

The Drinnon massacre was in July or August of the same year, and on that day John Prior and wife and little child were on the trail going to the Big Kanawha. The Indians captured the woman and child and

time he had a wife and child. that after accomplishing that great work, he fell a victim to a small roving band of Indians who had slipped into the Greenbrier settlements from the north. This is another straw that causes us to fix the year as 1778, though a very pretty story could be built up in which John Prior married in the Greenbrier country and started back for the fort at Point Pleasant two years after.

Taking it all in all, it can be said that the Drinnon massacre was the worse day Pocahontas people ever saw, though there were three battles fought in the county during the Civil War.

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